Three Years Among the Comanches

727 In time I came to understand that this was the usual summer residence of the tribe, where their corn and beans and tobacco were cultivated—that it, in fact, was their main camping ground, their home, and that the other valley was only resorted to for the purpose of hunting, during those moons when the hair on the buffalo is thick and long. In the suburbs of this village were extensive specimens of Indian agriculture. The Comanche women—for the men have nothing whatever to do with it—would not be likely to receive even a "volume of the Transactions," were they to compete for the prize offered for the best system of farming at one of our state fairs. The expense of drainage and subsoil ploughing is small; nevertheless, they manage to raise respectable crops.

727 The confidence I had in the shrewdness and judgment of Aikens, and the encouragement I had received from him in our interview, inspired me with hope, and I resolved to follow his advice to the letter. My fame, evidently, had spread abroad through the new community soon after our arrival, for those I had never seen before came and gazed upon me for a long time, and then turned and walked seriously and thoughtfully away. It was not long before Moko came with a group of the new faces and presented me the watch. My obstinacy was now abandoned, and I fell again, very deep, into the mysterious mood. Winding it up and setting the alarm a minute or two ahead, I bowed my face before it—clasped it affectionately to my bosom —held it out at arm's length before me in my two hands, regarding it with that intensity of expression with which a tragedian on the stage always regards a love letter just received—turning up my eyes adoringly towards the glorious heavens—and let it whiz!

The effect was solemn and satisfactory. I felt that I had

2: Lee T-5 (1855-1858) 1957
NO6 Comanche NO6

Departure from the Valley of Mannasaw

Lounging about the camp, I now led a monotonous and weary life until about November, or, at least, until after the season of buffalo hunting had arrived, when I was ordered, unexpectedly, one morning, to mount a mule, and riding forth from the camp, accompanied by Big Wolf and half a dozen of his warriors, I left behind me forever the beautiful valley of Mannasaw.

2: Lee T-5 (1855-1858) 1957
NO6 Comanche NO6

and are sanguine in the belief that the time will eventually arrive when they will be enabled, with the assistance of the Great Spirit, to sweep them from existence and reclaim their rightful inheritance. In their ignorance, they compare, favorably for themselves, their feeble strength with the whole power of the United States.

It would be cheaper for the government, in the end, instead of maintaining a line of military posts on the frontier—standing merely on the defensive—to send an army through their territories, giving them ocular demonstrations of its power, arresting their turbulent chiefs, and teaching them a lesson too impressive to be forgotten, that the rights of a citizen of the United States shall not be violated with impunity. Hundreds of our people, in the pursuit of their lawful business, are captured yearly, enslaved, and barbarously put to death, without attracting the attention of government, whereas if the hundredth part of the same outrages were committed by any enlightened nation, it would call upon the people to fly to arms. For my own part, I do not see why the arm of authority should not be stretched forth to protect the outraged citizen at the headwaters of the Guadaloupe with the same promptness it is to protect him in Paraguay, or on the Gulf of Mexico.

The camp of the Spotted Leopard, as has previously been seen, was situated at the source of the Boge Lescoha, at the foot of a mountain range. Fifty miles south, at the other extremity of the valley, were his planting grounds, where a small village had been constructed, and where a number of the tribe, principally squaws, usually remained.

I had been here several months when a party arrived from the plantation, among whom I observed were three white women, notwithstanding their faces were painted.

5: Carlson & Jones E, N-4, 5 (1933)1939
NO6 Comanche NO6

824 were not known by the particular informants questioned. One man felt that the white sage had a practical value, but did not know what it might be. Some of these plants have been recorded as used by tribes more or less in contact with the Comanche and may have been employed in a similar manner by the Comanche. The informant who pointed out the western ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*) gave its name as *woanatsu*, but knew of no use for it. The ending *natsu* [757] indicates a medicinal plant, and it is interesting to note that this plant was prescribed by the Cheyenne in the treatment of colds, cramps in bowels, and bloody stools (9, p. 188), and that it was also valued by the Gosiute in the treatment of sore eyes (6, p. 49), but has a quite different name, without the *natsu* ending, in Gosiute.

221 166 824 The Comanche were formerly a very nomadic people, particularly after their acquisition of the horse. Marcy and McClellan (15, pp. 94–95) describe them as following the buffalo from place to place and also tell of their horse- and cattle-stealing expeditions, which covered over a thousand miles and even took them into the northern provinces of Mexico, consuming two years or more at a time. Richardson (19) tells something of the migrations, movements, expeditions, and contacts of the Comanche. They appear to have been in at least occasional touch with Apache and Pueblo Indians of the Southwest and with Plains and Plateau tribes as far north as what is now the Canadian border. It seems reasonable that they should have been an important agency in the diffusion of plants and of knowledge of plant uses as well as of other culture traits. They controlled practically all the limited area in which the valuable *bois d'arc* or bowwood grew and from which it was traded to the Siouan, the Caddoan, and other tribes to the north, and to the Pueblos to the west. They doubtless also were instrumental in spreading the narcotic cults based on the peyote and mescal beans. La Barre (12, p. 43) considers the Kiowa and the Comanche to be the center of diffusion of peyote in the Plains. Both peyote and mescal beans were native to the southwestern region of Texas and in Mexico, but were diffused almost throughout the Plains and as far northeastward as the Great Lakes. Certainly the many similar plant uses of the Comanche and of other tribes of the Plains, the Plateau, and the Southwest indicate either Comanche contact with these various peoples or a very active dissemination of such traits throughout these areas.

7: Richardson D-4 (no date) 1929
NO6 Comanche NO6

622 became demoralized through contact with the white race and the desperate struggle for existence this brought about, the chiefs exercised more authority.[15] Cases of the formal arraignment and
622 trial of a warrior or chief, were exceedingly rare, if such ever
627 occurred; for the writer has never discovered a well authenticated record of such a procedure. A chief or leading brave might lash
[578] a boy or woman, but to strike another brave or chief generally meant a feud or civil war. Differences between tribesmen were settled by those directly concerned or by the relatives of the slain party. Of course, the law of an eye for an eye prevailed, but generally the heart of the offended party could be softened by judicious gifts. Generally the chiefs could make the men behave while they were in their presence and most men followed the admonition of their elders and leaders as a matter of course.

595 Polygamy was common, but before the advent of the white race
684 and its demoralizing influence on the savages the chastity of Comanche women rated high. During the period of Anglo-American relations it was not uncommon for a woman to run away from her husband in company with a spouse more to her liking. Traditional Comanche law provided that in such cases the offended husband might punish the woman by cutting off her nose, but this horrible practice was not always followed. In at least some cases the husband took back his erring spouse and rejoiced in his good fortune at being able to recover her.

221 For sustenance the Comanches depended almost entirely on game,
224 particularly the buffalo. These animals were generally hunted on horseback and brought down with the lance or shot with arrows at close range. Dependable authorities state that at times the Indians would drive the arrows completely through the carcass of the animal.[16] The natural tendency was for the bands to follow the buffaloes in their northward and southward migration, which practice made a sedentary existence impossible. At certain seasons, when the animals were fat, the hunt became a tribal affair and the slaughter of the great beasts took the shape of a cooperative

15. It is Mooney's opinion that the authority of the Kiowa chiefs suffered a sharp decline as a result of the advent of the white race and it is likely that the same thing occurred among the Comanches. See the Kiowa Indian Calendar, as cited, 283.

16. See Marcy, Exploration of Red River, as cited, 98.

7: Richardson D-4 (no date) 1929
NO6 Comanche NO6

undertaking. Generally the men did the killing while the women dressed the carcasses, loaded the meat on pack animals, took it to camp, and cooked it for immediate use or dried it as the occasion demanded. Some women were also hunters of recognized prowess.[17]

In seasons of plenty the squaws boned and split the meat, carved it into long chains, and threw it over poles to dry in the sun. Meat intended for immediate consumption was dried or cooked over a fire.

Naturally the Comanche women were adepts at tanning hides. The tanning of a deer skin is described thus:

> Having soaked the skins thoroughly, then throw them over a smooth log leaned against a tree at an angle, and then taking a rib of a deer in both hands, remove the hair by scraping it against the grain; they then stretched and dried them, when they became beautifully soft and white. To color them, they tied several into chimney shape, hung to a limb, and building smoulder fires under them they soon changed to a yellowish brown on the hair side, and light yellow on the flesh side.[18]

A somewhat different account is given by another observer. He states that:

> The skins were first staked down to the ground, flesh side up. With a sharp bone the squaw then scraped off every particle of flesh; next the scraped surface was spread with lime to absorb the grease, after which the surface was spread with the brains of the animal, rubbing it in and working it over till the skin became soft and pliable, the process requiring days and days of hard work.[19]

All authorities agree that the Comanches were unexcelled as horsemen. Catlin was amazed at their trick of dropping their body

17. In Notes Taken With Marcy, Parker tells of one woman, the widow of the Penateka chief, Santa Anna, who was said to have killed with her rifle as many as fifteen deer in one forenoon (pp. 192-193). Captain Marcy tells how he observed two young Comanche women of a northern band mount their horses and pursue and lasso each a young antelope which they brought back in triumph to the camp. Exploration of the Red River, 95.

18. Parker, Notes Taken with Marcy, 198-199.

19. Noah Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, Recollections of Old Texas Days, Compiled by his daughter, Nanna Smithwick Donaldson, Austin, Texas (not dated).

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-1819) 1954 NO6 Comanche 96
Texas

[ca. 1818]

175 628 tion of country which custom seems to have appropriated to its more special use and occupancy.

621 622 175 These three great national parties, are subdivided into captaincies or villages, to each of which is appointed a chief, whose distinction seems to consist rather in name than authority. His name however, gives title to the flying village, and is useful in this respect, as some sign of discrimination is necessary, and they can derive none from locality. These

621 175 subdivisions are various and contingent, each member being at liberty to withdraw from one village and unite with another, as caprice or convenience may dictate.

175 221 [231] As the Comanchees do not cultivate the ground, but derive their subsistence from the spontaneous productions of nature, and chiefly from the animal kingdom, they are necessarily migratory, and obliged to change their encampment every ten or fifteen days. The scarcity of game, which is soon taught to avoid their dangerous neighborhood, and the speedy exhaustion of convenient pasturage, which is indispensable to the subsistence of their large herds of mules and horses, are the principal reasons for such frequent removals. When about to abandon a position, they generally

175 202 fire the grass, to give intelligence of their decampment to absentees;—smoke is likewise employed as a telegraph to announce the return of a war party. It is not uncommon to see, at the same time, 8 or 10 of these signals darkening the horizon, and rearing their columns in gloomy grandeur, to the vertex of a serene and brilliant atmosphere.

175 643 The three parties collectively acknowledge one head or grand Chief, who is selected from either party. His appointment is indefinite as to duration and extent of authority, the latter depending more on the force of his personal char-

175 [642] [671] [692] acter, than on the investments of office. Indeed a positive official authority, is not recognized in their crude system of government. They have but few traditionary laws, and these, they are not always capable of enforcing. Compulsion is seldom exercised on a refractory culprit; and when imperious circumstances require it to be done, it is effected by a convention of chiefs, whose personal influences become auxiliary to an otherwise impotent authority.

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-i 19) 1954 NO6 Comanche NO6
Texas

[ca. 1818]

175 262 imagine, these beef chips are neither very palatable nor alimental after this operation; but they are still meat, and 175 meat is always desirable to a carniverous savage. The bene- 317 ficient author of nature has given them an inexhaustible supply of salt. They procure this excellent fossil from a saline near the sources of the Rio Brazos, where it is indurated by natural evaporation, into masses of different dimensions. When pulverized, it is of a beautiful whiteness, not 175 inferior to our best table salt. But owing to their roving 263 habits, the Indians are frequently destitute of this healthful and savoury ingredient in animal food, and eat their meat for months together without seasoning of any kind. They do not consider this privation as a very serious matter.

175 They make a kind of bread of the pods of the locust 262 tree, which grows abundantly throughout their range. These pods possess a small portion of sacchrine matter which renders the meal cohesive and gives it an agreeable though somewhat insipid taste; but in substance it is about as edible as saw-dust, which it resembles in appearance. The Peccan tree grows luxuriantly on all their water courses, and the delightful nut it affords, together with black and red hawes, prickly-pear apples, and some other spontaneous fruits, and a few excellent roots, eke out the scanty subsistence of these people, during the absence of their favorite Buffaloes.

175 Some of the lower or southern villages make an annual 22 visit to the Whacoes (a small tribe located on the Brazos) [439] and traffic horses for beans, melons, and corn. But owing to [261] their frequent migrations, they are not able to transport a permanent stock of these articles; and very soon after returning from the corn feast of their more provident neighbours, they relapse into their habitual alternations of feast or famine.

175 But Providence seems to have provided them with some 165 natural indemnities against the physical evils that might be supposed incidental to their irregular and versatile manner [164] of life. Notwithstanding their frequent and painful privations, they are subject to few diseases, and exhibit many instances of remarkable longevity. Men, whose furrowed

23: Cabello y Robles G-3 (1778-1786) 1961
NO6 Comanche NO6
Eastern Comanche

[ca. 1786]

much blindness and harshness, as if they were slaves. 000

SECOND: What Reciprocal Trade Has One Village With Another? 175 438 439

The commerce and trade that one village has with others is that the Eastern Comanche transport the horses which they acquire in their wars and robberies to the villages of the Western Comanche, that are known by the name *Yumbarioas* [*Yamparikas*], who are the ones that sell or barter rifles, powder, shot, lances, cloth, pottery, and knives which they acquire from the *Canse, Quita, Quirate and Aguaés*; these are also intermediaries in the commerce of buffalo hides, with and without hair, which they work and dress very well.

THIRD: What Strength Has Each One? 175

With respect to the strength of each settlement it is not possible to ascertain the number of people that compose them, nor of those of the other villages because they are accustomed to subdivide according to the way they accommodate themselves to the terrain in which they exist and the bounty of the hunt of the buffalo, on which they maintain themselves. Because of the shortage of firearms, they keep their strength gathered with the caution with which they always live; they never situate themselves in a place that will be very uncomfortable, but in which they will be able to be sheltered from their enemies, always having little [scouting] parties circling to observe whether or not they are being attacked. They have the system of wandering from one place to another without maintaining themselves in a fixed locale, and in such manner they plant no crops. They maintain themselves only from the flesh of buffalo and deer, and some roots like sweet potatoes that are abundant in the territory in which they travel.

621 224 175 721 621 175 221 [241] [262]

FOURTH: What Territory Do They Ordinarily Occupy? 175

The Rancherias of the Eastern [Comanche] Indians are 131 [133]

221
224 **The Comanche were nomad buffalo**
hunters, constantly on the move, cultivating little from the ground, and living
181 in skin tipis. They were long noted as the
(186) finest horsemen of the plains and bore a reputation for dash and courage. They
have a high sense of honor and hold themselves superior to the other tribes
142 with which they are associated. In person they are well built and rather corpu-
197 lent. Their language is the trade language of the region and is more or less understood by all the neighboring tribes.
[194] It is sonorous and flowing, its chief characteristic being a rolling *r*. The language has several dialects.

614 The gentile system seems to be unknown among the Comanche. They have, or still
101 remember, 12 recognized divisions or bands
621 and may have had others in former times. Of these all but 5 are practically extinct. The Kwahari and Penateka are the most
[115] important. Following, in alphabetic order, is the complete list as given by their leading chiefs: Detsanayuka or Nokoni; Ditsakana, Widyu, Yapa, or Yamparika; Kewatsana; Kotsai; Kotsoteka; Kwahari or Kwahadi; Motsai; Pagatsu; Penateka or Penande; Pohoi (adopted Shoshoni); Tanima; Tenawa or Tenahwit; Waaih.
101 In addition to these the following have also been mentioned by writers as divisions of the Comanche: Guagejohe, Muvinabore, Nauniem, Parkeenaum. See *Dotame*. (J. M.)

Allebome.—Lewis and Clark, Discov., 39, 1806 (so called by the French; see *Ne'-mo-sin*, below). **Bald Heads.**—Long, Exped. Rocky Mts., I, 155, 1823. **Bo'dälk'inago.**—Mooney in 14th Rep. B. A. E., 1043, 1896 (Kiowa name: 'reptile people', 'snake men'). **Cadouca.**—Domenech, Deserts N. Am., II, 100, 1860 (misprint of Padouca). **Camanche.**—Pike, Trav., xiv, 214, note, 1811. **Camanchees.**—Pilcher in Sen. Doc. 128, 25th Cong., 2d sess., 23, 1838. **Camarsches.**—Morse, Rep. to Sec. War, 367, 1822. **Ca'-tha.**—Hayden, Ethnog. and Philol. Mo. Val., 326, 1862 ('having many horses'; Arapaho name). **Caumuches.**—La Harpe (1719) in Margry, Déc., VI, 289, 1886. **Caunoucha.**—Benuzain, ibid. **Caw-mainah.**—Gebow, Shoshonay Vocab., 8, 1868 (Shoshoni name). **Cemanles.**—Escalante (1776) misquoted by Harry in Simpson, Explor. across Utah, 495, 1876. **Cintu-aluka.**—Corliss, Dacotah MS. vocab., B. A. E., 106, 1874 (Teton name). **Comances.**—Schoolcraft, Pers. Mem., 620, 1851. **Comancha.**—Barreiro, Ojeada, app., 9, 1832. **Comanchees.**—Abert in Emory, Recon., 470, 1848. **Comanchero.**—Gregg, Comm. Prairies, II, 56, 1844 (Spanish form). **Comanches.**—Sanchez (1757) in Doc. Hist. Mex., 4th s., I, 88, 1856. **Comanchos.**—Taylor in Cal. Farmer, Apr. 10, 1863. **Comandes.**—Maximilian, Trav., 510, 1843. **Comandus.**—Alegre, Hist. Comp. Jesus, I, 336, 1841. **Comanshima.**—Bourke, Moquis of Ariz., 118, 1884 (Hopi name). **Comantz.**—Gregg, Comm. Prairies, II, 34, 1844 (Comanche pronunciation). **Comauch.**—Morse, Rep. to Sec. War, 374, 1822 (misprint). **Cumanche.**—Doc. of 1720 quoted by Bandelier in Arch. Inst. Pap., V, 183, 1890. **Cumancias.**—Long, Exped. to Rocky Mts., I, 478, 1823. **Cumeches.**—Schermerhorn in Mass. Hist. Coll., II, 29, 1812. **Da'tsĕ-as.**—Gatschet, MS., B. A. E. (Kiowa Apache name). **Gyai'-ko.**—Mooney in 14th Rep. B. A. E., 1043, 1896 ('enemies': Kiowa name). **Idahi.**—Ibid. (Kiowa Apache name). **Indá.**—Hodge, field notes, B. A. E., 1895 (Jicarilla name).

[p.328-A]